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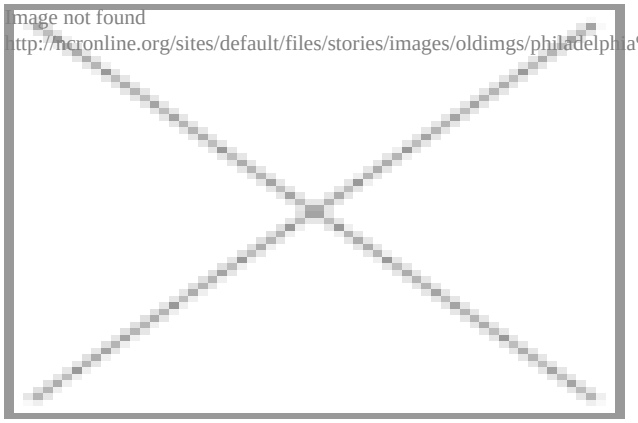
Jesuit university to purchase Philadelphia bishop's mansion

Brian Roewe | Sep. 10, 2012 NCR Today

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput is one step closer to moving out of the 16-room and 23,350*-square-foot mansion his fellow archbishops have called home since 1935.



Jesuit school St. Joseph's University announced Sept. 7 it had signed a letter of intent to purchase the 8.9-acre property from the Philadelphia archdiocese for $10 million.

The mansion is contiguous to the 48-acre St. Joseph's campus, which has a student population of nearly 9,000 students.

"Acquiring this adjacent property presents an opportunity that will be integral to the University?s long-term strategic planning, "Saint Joseph?s President Jesuit Fr. C. Kevin Gillespie said in a statement. "As we look to the future, this opens exciting possibilities for the University community, and it will further enhance our students? experience for decades to come."

Gillespie said there are no immediate plans for the property, and the university will focus its attention in the coming weeks to finalizing the deal, made possible from a "combination of donor support and internal resources," a university statement read.

In recent years, bishops in other dioceses have sold, or at least considered selling their high-priced homes to cover growing expenses. In 2004, the Boston archdiocese sold its archbishop's residence along with 43 acres to Boston College for $99.4 million, which the archdiocese used to pay off loans tied to clergy sex abuse settlements.

In 2002, archbishop of Chicago Cardinal Francis George was met with protest from preservationists when he considered selling the three-story redbrick home to offset growing deficits. The cardinal continues to live in "House of 19 Chimneys," home to every Windy City archbishop, dating back to 1885.

In 1975, the Milwaukee archdiocese sold its bishop's residence of 60 years, the Pabst Mansion (home of

German-American brewer Frederick Pabst), to a developer for $500,000. And in 1989, Detroit Pistons basketball player John Salley purchased the 400,000 square-foot, 62-room archbishop's mansion, built in 1926, from the Detroit archdiocese, also at a $500,000 price tag.

Chaput made the decision to sell the mansion in January, days before he would announce a dramatic realignment for the archdiocese's Catholic schools [1]. Ultimately, 27 schools closed, and in August, management of archdiocesan high schools was turned over to a private foundation.

Since then, the archbishop has taken additional steps to ease an operating deficit for the current fiscal year exceeding $17 million, including shuttering the 117-year-old Catholic Standard and Times newspaper, laying off 45 employees, and closing or merging 19 offices and ministries.

According to multiple reports, Chaput will relocate to St. Charles Borromeo Seminary and the apartment of the late Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua once the sale completes.

The archdiocese has also placed Villa St. Joseph by the Sea, a 9,800 square-foot oceanfront beach home for retired priests in Ventnor, N.J., on the market, estimated to be valued at $6 million.

[*An earlier version of this story contained the incorrect square footage of the Philadelphia estate.*]

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